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INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0070

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 000210

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: PM SOCRATES INVITED TO CARACAS

REF: A. 07 LISBON 2949
[1](#)B. 06 LISBON 2160

Classified By: Dana M. Brown, Pol-Econ Officer, Embassy Lisbon
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) A Portuguese daily recently reported that Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates would visit Caracas by March, citing the Venezuelan presidency's website. Bernard Amaral, one of the Prime Minister's diplomatic advisors, confirmed to us that Hugo Chavez had invited Socrates during the former's Lisbon stopover last November (ref A). Amaral, however, said Socrates had not yet decided whether to accept the invitation, and he provided no sense of when the decision would be made or what it would be. Amaral added that Portuguese Secretary of State for Commerce, Fernando Serrasqueira, was leading a trade delegation to Venezuela on January 21-23 to strengthen business-to-business linkages. Serrasqueira's visit was the only official visit to Venezuela confirmed for this year, he emphasized.

Comment

[1](#)2. (C) As we have reported regularly, Portugal and Venezuela have a complicated relationship. Portuguese policy toward Caracas is driven primarily by concerns over the well-being of the 500,000-strong Portuguese community resident there. For that reason, Socrates has been reluctant to confront Chavez publicly, although the Portuguese Prime Minister shares our concerns about Chavez's undemocratic tendencies and actions. While the GOP turned down Chavez's request to visit in 2005 because of unhappiness over Venezuela's detention of a Portuguese pilot accused of drug trafficking, Chavez subsequently has made two visits to Lisbon. In 2006, he met with Socrates at the Lisbon airport during a refueling stop and in November 2007, the Prime Minister hosted his Venezuelan counterpart for a dinner during a several-hour stopover in Lisbon.

[1](#)3. (C) In deciding whether to make a first visit to Caracas during his term as Prime Minister, we suspect Socrates is weighing very carefully his concerns about the Portuguese community there against the realization that a visit would send a very unhelpful political message. End comment.
Stephenson